

5

Ancient Egypt

Learning Objectives

The following summarizes what a student should have learned from reading this chapter of *A History of Western Art*.

It is assumed that students can identify all works by title, artist (if known), culture (or nationality) and time period, medium, and style. It is also assumed that students will look up and be able to define the bolded key terms. In addition, further examples of what a student should be familiar with are listed below.

After reading Chapter 5, students should be able to do the following:

1. Locate Giza, Saqqara, Cairo, Akhetaten, Deir el-Bahri, Abu Simbel and Meroë on a map of Egypt and Nubia.
2. Describe the political iconography and formal conventions of the Palette of Narmer.
3. Describe the Egyptian concept of death, and the process of mummification.
4. Compare the funerary temple of Hatshepsut with the temple of Amon-Mut-Khonsu.
5. List the major Egyptian gods and their functions.
6. Compare the Old Kingdom sculpture style with that of the Amarna period.
7. Describe the development of the pyramid from the mastaba.
8. Describe the Egyptian conventions of painting and sculpture.
9. Trace the style of royal representation from the Old to the New Kingdom.
10. Discuss Akhenaton's revolution.
11. Compare the Meroë pyramids with the Giza pyramids.
12. Describe the relationship between Egypt and Nubia.

Lecture Outline

- A. The Gift of the Nile
 - a. Annual floods created a fertile river valley
 - b. Home of one of the most enduring and powerful civilizations in the ancient world
- B. The Pharaohs
 - a. Power over the people and land virtually absolute
 - b. Monumental art on a vast scale begins with their rule
 - c. Reigned mostly uninterrupted from the fifth millennium B.C. until 343 B.C in the Late Dynastic period
- C. The Egyptian Concept of Kingship
 - a. Egyptian kings considered themselves gods
 - b. Their behavior not an example for the public but a distinction from it

- D. The Palette of Narmer
 - a. Designed to project the ruler's power
 - b. Proclaims Narmer's rule of both upper and lower Egypt
 - c. Every image conveys Narmer's might and importance
- E. The Old Kingdom (2649–2150 B.C.)
 - a. Pyramids
 - i. Monumental expression of pharaoh's power, and his burial place
 - ii. Preceded by smaller funerary structures called mastabas
 - iii. The best known were built for three pharaohs of the Fourth Dynasty
 - 1. Khufu—known as the Great Pyramid
 - 2. Khafre—son of Khufu
 - 3. Menkaure—son of Khafre
 - b. Egyptian Gods
 - c. Mummification
 - i. Death: a transitional phase to existence on another plane
 - ii. Much of art and writings surviving today are funerary
 - iii. Egyptians had great interest in continued material existence in the afterlife
 - d. Sculpture
 - i. Certain conventions followed for sculpting
 - ii. The more important the person represented, the more rigorously the conventions were observed
 - iii. The Egyptian Canon of Proportion—commonly accepted guidelines for depicting the ideal human figure
- F. The Middle Kingdom (c. 1991–1700 B.C.)
 - a. Monumental architecture continued
 - b. New form of tomb replaced the pyramid
 - c. With political turbulence, a new approach to royal representation emerged
- G. The New Kingdom (c. 1550–1070 B.C.)
 - a. Temple construction continued to be refined
 - i. Temples were considered a microcosm of the universe
 - ii. Temple of Amon-Mut-Khonsu at Luxor
 - 1. Temple entry reserved for the elite
 - 2. Architecture had a careful transitional quality
 - b. Hatshepsut's Mortuary Temple and Sculpture
 - i. Hatshepsut was the first female pharaoh
 - ii. Main architectural innovation of her reign was the terraced mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri
 - c. Painting
 - i. Ancient Egyptians were the first to use synthetic pigments
 - ii. Gypsum Plaster—in the tomb of Nebamun; abundant use of pale blue pigments made from lapis lazuli
 - iii. Papyrus—painting on papyrus from the *Book of the Dead* used graphics and hieroglyphics to help illustrate a funerary ritual

- iv. The Tomb of Nefertari—one of the best- preserved group of New Kingdom paintings
 - 1. Revealed the extraordinary richness of color and complexity of Egyptian royal burials
- d. The Amarna Period (c. 1349–1336 B.C.)
 - i. Amenhotep IV replaced entrenched religious cults with an unpopular monotheistic religious system
 - ii. Dramatic stylistic and iconographic changes occur
 - iii. At the end of the period, traditional artistic style and the priestly hierarchy were reinstated
- H. Tutankhamon’s Tomb
 - a. Tutankhamon reigned c. 1336–1327 B.C.
 - b. His tomb was discovered intact in 1922 by English Egyptologist Howard Carter
 - c. Effigy demonstrates the return to traditional iconography
 - d. The contents of Tutankhamon’s tomb ultimately became one of the world’s most popular and widely traveled museum exhibits
- I. Egypt and Nubia
 - a. Nubia was rich in natural resources and was often raided by the Egyptians
 - b. In the Eighteenth and Nineteenth dynasties, the Egyptians built their most imposing temples in Nubia
 - i. The Rock-cut Temple of Ramses II—one of six colossal structures south of Aswan
 - ii. Meroë—artistic style of artifacts derived from the Egyptian style but demonstrate artistic and architectural independence

Key Terms

canon
 cartouche
 clerestory
 hypostyle
 mastaba
 obelisk
 papyrus
 pylon
 pyramidion

Arts and Artists

This is a list of all the key works in this chapter.

5.1 Palette of Narmer, from Hierakonpolis, c. 3000 B.C.

5.2 Palette of Narmer (reverse side of fig. 5.1).

- 5.4 Step pyramid, funerary complex of King Zoser, Saqqara, Egypt, 2630–2611 B.C.
- 5.5 Pyramids at Giza, Egypt, 2551–2472 B.C.
- 5.7 Colossal statue of Khafre, known as the Great Sphinx, Giza, c. 2520–2494 B.C.
- 5.8 Seated statue of Khafre, from Giza, c. 2520–2494 B.C.
- 5.10 Menkaure and Queen Khamerernebt, from Giza, 2490–2472 B.C.
- 5.11 Seated scribe, from Saqqara, c. 2551–2528 B.C.
- 5.12 Sesostri III, c. 1878–1841 B.C.
- 5.15 Court and pylon of Ramses II and colonnade and court of Amenhotep III, temple of Amon-Mut-Khonsu, Luxor, Egypt, 19th Dynasty, c1279–1212 B.C.
- 5.16 Statue of Hatshepsut as pharaoh, 18th Dynasty, c. 1473–1458 B.C.
- 5.17 Funerary temple of Queen Hatshepsut, Deir el-Bahri, Egypt, 18th Dynasty.
- 5.18 Nebamun hunting birds, from the tomb of Nebamun, Thebes, Egypt, c. 1390–1352 B.C.
- 5.19 Opening of the Mouth ceremony, from the *Book of the Dead* of Hunefer, New Kingdom, 19th Dynasty, c. 1295–1186 B.C.
- 5.20 Queen Nefertari before the Divine Scribe Thoth, from the tomb of Nefertari, north wall, Valley of the Queens, Egypt, New Kingdom, 19th Dynasty, 1290–1224 B.C.
- 5.21 Akhenaten, from Karnak, Egypt, 1353–1350 B.C.
- 5.22a, b Bust of Nefertiti (side and back views), Amarna period, 1349–1336 B.C.
- 5.23 Akhenaten and Nefertiti and their daughters, Amarna period, 1349–1336 B.C.
- 5.24 Mask of Tutankhamon, c. 1327 B.C.
- 5.25 Canopic coffinettes of Tutankhamon, c. 1333–23 B.C.
- 5.26 Nubians bringing offerings to Egypt, Thebes, 19th dynasty, c. 1295–1186 B.C.
- 5.27 Temple of Ramses II, Abu Simbel, Nubia, 1279–1213 B.C.
- 5.28 Tomb of Amanishakheto, Meroë, Nubia, late 1st century B.C. Drawing from F. Cailliaud, *Voyage à Meroë*, Paris, 1823–1827, plate XLI.
- 5.29 Shield ring with Amon as a ram, Meroë, Nubia, c. 200 B.C.

Discussion Questions

1. Throughout much of Western history, political rulers have used art and architecture to enhance their authority and maintain their power. Analyze Egyptian art in this regard. What different hierarchies did Egyptian art convey? What techniques did Egyptian artists use to convey these hierarchies? What sorts of monumental structures did Egyptian rulers have built as expressions of their power, and what architectural elements did these structures use to express that power? Based on Egyptian art and architecture, what made a good ruler and what was the basis of the ruler's authority?
2. The pyramids of Ancient Egypt represent impressive feats of architectural engineering, but they had no direct administrative or practical purpose, being used instead to house the corpses of pharaohs. What does it suggest about Egyptian society that it devoted so much labor and capital to the construction of tombs? What view of death does this practice convey, and, more importantly, what view of life does it suggest? Can one see similar traits in other works of Egyptian art? Can all Egyptian art be said to favor death over life?
3. A perhaps curious feature of Ancient Egyptian art is that, during some periods, the lower one's status, the more likely one's portrait would reveal one's individual characteristics. Pharaohs, by contrast, were depicted in a much more stylized form. Analyze this quirk of Egyptian art in terms of Egyptian views of kingship. What was the connection between the pharaohs and the gods? What was the connection between the pharaohs and the people over whom they ruled? Explore the various ways by which Egyptian art made these connections clear.